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Country note**

Colombia

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Colombia for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2007.

The situation of children and women

1. Colombia has a population of 42 million, 16 million of whom are children under 18 years of age. The country has a per capita gross national product of $2,250 and is well endowed with a diversity of natural resources. However, due to several internal and external factors, during 1998 and 1999, the economic growth rate declined to 0.2 per cent and -5 per cent, respectively. The difficult economic situation, combined with the armed conflict, are severely affecting Colombian families. An estimated 55 per cent of the population, 18 million people, of whom 6.5 million are children, live in poverty. The country is also vulnerable to natural disasters, including earthquakes, floods and volcanic eruptions. Those most affected by poverty and exclusion are the 81 Indian peoples and the Afro-Colombian population (2 per cent and 7 per cent of the population, respectively), and those displaced internally by the armed conflict.

2. The ongoing armed conflict and insecurity are seriously affecting Colombian families and children. Although peace negotiations are under way between the Government and two guerrilla groups, it is estimated that more than 3,000 children

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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are members of illegal armed groups. In December 1999, the Government prohibited the enlistment of minors in the regular armed forces. A report of the non-governmental organization (NGO) "Fundación País Libre" indicated that between 1994 and 2000, 966 children were kidnapped.

3. According to other NGO reports, between 1985 and 1999, around 1.9 million persons were displaced from the conflict regions and municipalities; of these, 62 per cent were children and women. Despite the Government's response to meet basic needs, with the support of the international community, this vulnerable population is still at risk. In August 2000, the Constitutional Court approved ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. During the 1990s, 732 mine victims were reported, 55 of whom were children.

4. In spite of this difficult situation, Colombia has been able to achieve many of the goals of the World Summit for Children, although some shortfalls exist. The infant mortality rate (IMR) was 26 per 1,000 live births in 1998, but was as high as 76 per 1,000 in the poorest regions. The incidence of low birth weight has been reduced to 8 per cent. In 1998, Colombia was certified as free of iodine deficiency disorders. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) has decreased from 116 to 80 per 100,000 live births, although in some regions it reaches 130 per 100,000. While 95 per cent of mothers begin to breastfeed, only 11 per cent practice it exclusively for a full six months. Access to safe water and sanitation is limited in rural and peri-urban areas, as well as in many schools.

5. Primary school enrolment is 90 per cent (1998) with no gender disparity, but improvement in quality is required. Of 100 children who enter primary school, only 59 complete fifth grade, and of these, only 40 do so in five years. Early childhood care and pre-school education services cover only 30 per cent of children. Around 2.7 million adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 do not attend school. Adolescent pregnancy has increased by 50 per cent over the last decade. Although HIV/AIDS prevalence is low, it is a growing problem.

6. Serious efforts are required in key areas of child rights protection. Almost 3.5 million children have not been registered because of cultural resistance and institutional shortfalls. According to the Office of the People's Defender, 2 million children are victims of maltreatment and 1.7 million children between the ages of 12 and 17 work, 25 per cent of them in dangerous occupations such as mining; 70 per cent of child workers do not attend school. Additionally, 30,000 adolescents are currently involved in judicial proceedings for having committed criminal offences. According to the Colombian Family Welfare Institute, 30,000 children, mostly boys, live in the streets. The majority of these children abandon their homes to escape abuse and intra-family violence. Half the 18,000 cases of physical abuse recorded by the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Bogota are sexual abuse; girls comprise the majority of the victims. In its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in September 2000, the Government recognized its shortfalls in the implementation of the Convention and committed itself to enhance efforts to address them.

7. Adding to the difficult and politically complex situation facing the country is the issue of narcotics cultivation and trafficking. Government actions to address this problem, partly financed by the international community, include, inter alia, a package of social projects in the regions and municipalities most affected.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

8. The preceding programmes of cooperation, 1992-1996 and 1997-1999, included 11 programmes. The 1996 mid-term review recommended focusing on only three programme areas: local development, public policy, and communication and social mobilization. This structure was adopted during the 2000-2001 bridging period, resulting in substantially improved coordination between UNICEF and its counterparts.

9. Inter-institutional partnerships in programmes and projects carried out in 17 departments and 80 municipalities have strengthened coordination and sustainability in the areas of planning, management and funding. Co-financing has allowed much greater leveraging of government and NGO resources, enhancement of ownership, expansion of successful experiences and influence on public policies in the areas of health, water and sanitation, and culturally adapted education for Amerindian children.

10. Alliances with universities and others, including the private sector, have facilitated training, information generation, and evaluation of fulfilment of rights and goals of the World Summit. Nonetheless, achieving all the goals of the Summit is a high priority task. A national information system is required that allows for effective monitoring and evaluation of the impact of policies and programmes for children.

11. Effective social communication has enhanced the involvement of civil society in rights fulfilment and has allowed children to express their views on issues affecting them. Having traditionally worked for children, UNICEF is learning to work with children. The Children's Movement for Peace has positioned itself at the national and international levels. Expanded participation of Colombian children in the promotion and development of a culture of respect for child and human rights is required.

12. Over the past four years, innovative humanitarian interventions have been carried out in regions affected by the internal conflict, with the church as a key partner of UNICEF. This experience has also allowed for a quick response to meet the needs of children in natural disasters. The UNICEF Bogota Area Office was able to effectively support the emergency situations resulting from the earthquake in Colombia and the floods in Venezuela during 1999.

Proposed country programme strategy

13. UNICEF will continue to support the participation of Colombian children; advocate for the creation of a culture of respect and integral approach to the defence of their rights; strengthen alliances with civil society organizations; and promote social development aimed at reducing exclusion and fulfilling children's rights. The new country programme will be harmonized with the human-rights based Common Country Assessment and with priorities of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which will be completed in 2002. Consultations with the Government, counterparts, NGOs and bilateral and multilateral agencies on programme priorities and strategies have taken place.

14. The country programme is being prepared while peace is being negotiated. Given the uncertainty regarding the future evolution of the situation, two extreme scenarios — the conclusion of peace agreements, or escalation of the conflict — are possible, so a flexible programme is required. The country programme should be able to move between social development activities and humanitarian interventions.

15. The strategic thrust of the country programme is the promotion and defence of child, adolescent and women's rights, equity and social inclusion. The objective is to place the problems of children, particularly the most vulnerable, among the main concerns of the State and civil society, and to develop a culture of respect for rights. The country programme is in harmony with the Government's national development strategy and priorities that focus on: reduction of poverty and inequity, with equal opportunities for the most vulnerable; promotion of a culture of peace based on respect for human rights, tolerance and solidarity; and equitable allocation of public resources among regions.

16. The objectives of the new country programme will be: to promote a sense of equity, solidarity and respect for the rights of children, adolescents and women; to support the State in the design and implementation of public policies and social development models for the fulfilment of the rights of children and improvement of the quality of life of vulnerable groups; to support the design of information systems for the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of public policies on the most vulnerable groups; to promote and support initiatives of the State and civil society oriented towards the reconstruction of the social fabric and the creation of a peaceful society; and to provide humanitarian assistance to children and women displaced by the conflict, in affected regions and communities.

17. The principal strategies will be: flexible programming that allows for adjustments in time and space; alliances with civil society organizations, the private sector and cooperation agencies to build a national movement for children's rights; an integral programming approach focusing on the rights perspective; institutional strengthening, prioritizing the vulnerable municipalities; strengthening of citizen participation and oversight to achieve greater efficiency in social investments; prevention and resolution of conflict in the family, the school and society; articulation by the State and civil society of the full realization of children's rights; and the reduction of socio-economic exclusion. The new country programme is structured around two clusters of interventions which will respond and adapt to the situation as it evolves. Humanitarian response to natural disasters will be incorporated.

18. The *promotion and defence of the rights of children, adolescents and women programme* aims to consolidate a culture of recognition and fulfilment of children's rights in accordance with the principles established in the Constitution, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The main interventions will be: prevention of intra-family violence; support to extremely vulnerable children; governance and the ethical-juridical foundations of a culture for children; and participation and citizenship. This programme is national in scope, with some local interventions.

19. The *promotion of equity and social inclusion programme* will work to improve the living conditions of the most vulnerable families and children. Interventions comprise: humanitarian assistance to victims of violence, armed conflict and natural disasters; improvement of the availability and quality of health services; provision

of information on food security and HIV/AIDS prevention; early childhood care, and pre-school and primary education; and promotion of a healthy environment for families, communities and schools. This programme will focus on the most vulnerable regions and municipalities, with policy inputs at the national level.

20. The ongoing subregional Amazon and PROANDES programmes, which were separately approved by the Executive Board, complement this country programme. Cross-sectoral costs comprise salaries and operating costs. Based on experience, potential for leveraging local resources is very encouraging. The consolidation and development of effective alliances and strategies for the mobilization of local resources should gradually increase local contributions.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2002-2007[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Promotion and defence of the rights of children, adolescents and women	1 800	5 400	7 200
Promotion of equity and social inclusion	2 045	9 900	11 945
Cross-sectoral costs	1 230	2 700	3 930
Total	**5 075**	**18 000**	**23 075**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.